

Park and Recreation Commission Meeting
March 10, 2025 at 7:00 pm

Present: Christopher Gerstel (Chair), Michelle Geddes (Vice-Chair), Cynthia Chaston (Member), Dina Hannigan, (Member), James Rosenbaum (Member) via Zoom, Stacey Mulroy (Director), Nikki Witham (Administrative Analyst) via Zoom

Guests: Stefanie Forman, Jit Basak

Call to Order

Mr. Gerstel called the meeting to order at 7:12pm, March 10, 2025

Open Forum Public Comment

Stefanie Forman, a Needham resident, and Vice-President of the Newman PTC, brought forward her concerns about the condition of the playgrounds at the Newman Elementary School. She is especially concerned about the turf and the nine holes that are there causing trip hazards for the kids. They also pick at the holes, making them worse. She is hoping the Commission can help to patch or replace the turf at the playground. She also mentioned that the Kindergarten playground needs to be re-envisioned. Additionally, the playground space needs to be re-envisioned. She said the sign states that it is meant for 3–5-year-olds. Most kids will be 6 by the end of the year. The current Kindergarten class is 106 students, and the equipment does not allow the students to play freely. There are often long lines and congestion at the equipment. The swings are low, they continue to drag their feet and can't pump their legs effectively. She also said that the monkey bars are only 58" high where the average six-year-old is 54"-56". Many of the kids will walk the monkey bars instead of challenging themselves to grab and swing on them. There is not enough space for the kids to all be in the playground area. They need to utilize the courtyard area and are confined to a small concrete space. The courtyard does not really allow the students to play as there aren't any apparatuses there. The school has asked the PTC to purchase games so that the students have something to do during this time. She is asking Park & Recreation at a minimum to raise the swing height, and potentially also allocate funds envisioning new playground equipment that is similar to the Broadmeadow or Sunita Williams schools. All the teachers and assistants that she has spoken with would like to see the playground fixed and re-envisioned. She is also asking if the Commission has never been, to please go and check it out to see what the thoughts are. Mr. Gerstel thanked Ms. Forman for her concerns and let her know that they are always trying to keep up with all the playgrounds and keep up with the issues that come up with each one. It's always good to hear from the PTC's as when these things come up for updates, the Commission looks to the user groups for feedback. Ms. Chaston asked Ms. Mulroy if they could put this on as an open discussion item for the next meeting.

Meeting Guests

None

Director's Report

Ms. Mulroy told the Commission the Department is getting ready for Summer registration to begin on March 12, 2025. She said that Swim lesson registration may have to be put on hold as the schedule is still being worked out. She said that Winter programs are coming to an end and Spring programs will start at the beginning of April. She reminded the Commission that Tennis Academy will not be running this summer due to construction of the courts at the high school and construction at Newman. The Engineering camp also will not be running this summer as there are no staff to run it. The hope is that both camps will be back in 2026. The department is working with the Needham Public Schools to address staffing needs for our ESY and Summer Bridges program collaboration.

Parks & Forestry and Park & Recreation have been meeting weekly and will be sending out a slide deck to use groups about staying off the fields during the muddy season in order to help protect the fields from being too damaged before they are open for the season.

Ms. Mulroy explained to the Commission that the tennis/pickleball courts were never closed this season as an answer to last year's concerns. Court badges are now live for purchase at https://needhamprograms.myrec.com/info/activities/programs_details.aspx?ProgramID=30486. She also said the Department has purchased new pickleball nets, but that storage continues to be an issue.

Ms. Mulroy told the Commission that they are looking to open the pools for limited hours during the weeks of May 17th through the end of the school year. The hope is to at least be open for lap swim. There will also be time on the weekends to train staff and be able to train with our own equipment. Mr. Gerstel asked if the pool can handle early opening? Ms. Mulroy assured the Commission that Weston & Sampson are on notice to open by May 17, 2025. Pool memberships are set to go on sale next week with a 25% discount if purchased by April 14, 2025.

Summer staffing is underway, and the camps are in good shape. There are about 21 lifeguards that have confirmed for the summer, so the department is still looking to hire more lifeguards and water safety instructors. There was discussion about Needham being on low end of the pay scale for lifeguards and water safety instructors and how that could be affecting the hiring process. Ms. Chasten asked if there was anything the Commission could do to elevate the issue. She also asked if there was a way to offer bonuses. Ms. Mulroy has been in talks with Human Resources about looking at Schedule C, which is the pay scale summer employees follow about bumping up the pay. Ms. Chaston said maybe talking with the Selectboard would help to make them aware of the situation and try to impress upon them how important it is to make sure everyone has the opportunity to learn to swim.

Ms. Mulroy gave an update of the budget and finances. The Action Sports Park and Eliot School Renovations were presented to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) on January 22nd and to the Finance Committee on March 5th. Park & Recreation will have its CPC public hearing on March 12th. Since October 2024, we have collected \$30,090 in Administration fees and \$74,105 in Maintenance fees. The Department has also collected \$31,863.90 in Light Usage fees.

The dugouts have been delivered to Claxton. They had to move the bleachers about 6 feet over to address concerns about being able to see over the fence. The benches are being delivered at the end of the month. Ms. Geddes asked if there were any pads on the fence in front of the stands. Ms. Mulroy told her no, it's just a chain link fence.

Ms. Mulroy reviewed program numbers with the Commission and said Spring Adult numbers look good. They have about 500 participants out of about 1,200 seats. They don't have a ton of registrations for the Spring yet, but overall registration is going well.

Ms. Mulroy let the Commission know they need to change a couple of upcoming meeting dates. They need to change the meeting on April 14th because it is Patriots Day and May 26th because it is Memorial Day. She also mentioned changing the March 24th meeting because of the League of Women Voter's Candidates night.

Discussion Items

A. Commission Policies/Goals

Mr. Gerstel suggested looking the policies/goals over and at the next meeting discuss further and make any changes/updates.

B. Community Preservation Committee

Park & Recreation has its meeting with CPC on Wednesday, March 12, 2025.

C. Memorial Day Tournament

The Commission discussed their conversation with Mark Miskin, one of the organizers for the Memorial Day Tournament, and felt that he understood the price increases for this year and moving forward. Talk ensued about looking at the prices every three years, but Mr. Gerstel feels he would like to look at it every year, not necessarily to change them every year, but would like the ability to do so. They agreed to charge the Needham Soccer Club \$20,000 this year, a \$5,000 increase from last year. They felt that maybe talking with him after the Field Summit would be a good time to reassess things. Ms. Mulroy asked about memorializing this in a policy or creating a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). She asked if this particular tournament was a stand-alone event, or if a policy could be created to encompass all tournaments. The Commission decided that they should further explore this in September and think about creating a policy.

Action Items

A. Special Event Approvals

1.) Easter Egg Hunt by Avenue Church- The Commission discussed this event and ultimately decided that they needed more information. Mr. Gerstel wants to check with Parks & Forestry about putting up pop-up tents and trying to see if they could have their event someplace else.

2.) Shredding Truck Event- This event falls under the jurisdiction of Public Facilities and therefore does not need approval from the Commission.

3.) Youth Summer Skills Clinic-

Ms. Geddes made a motion to approve the Youth Summer Skills Clinic to be held by Needham Youth Field Hockey on Monday, July 14, 2025 – Friday, July 19, 2025, from 8:30am – 12:15pm at Brock or Founders Field. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion, and it passed as follows: Chris Gerstel - yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum - yes, Dina Hannigan - abstained

4.) St. Joe's School – Field Day

Mr. Gerstel made a motion to approve St. Joe's School Field Day to be held on Monday, June 9, 2025, from 7:00 am – 3:00 pm at Greene's Multi-purpose and Diamond with the contingency that the Director of Park & Recreation check and see if there has been any kind of fee in the past. If so, then the Commission should decide whether to charge them this year or not. If there has not been a fee, then there is no charge for this year's event. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion, and it passed as follows: Chris Gerstel- yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum- yes, Dina Hannigan - yes

5.) Athletic Competition for Corporate and First Responders-

Ms. Hannigan made a motion to approve the Athletic Competition for Corporate and First Responders event to be held by the Charles River YMCA on Friday, May 16, 2025, from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm provided the Commission receive more information with regards to the event. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion, and it passed as follows: Chris Gerstel- yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum- yes, Dina Hannigan - yes

6.) Annual Boy Scout Camporee-

Ms. Hannigan made a motion to approve the Annual Boy Scout Camporee, held by BSA Troop 13 Needham on Saturday, September 20, 2025, to Sunday, September 21, 2025, from 8:00am on Saturday, the 20th to 12:00pm on Sunday the 21st with no fee for the parking lot. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion, and it passed as follows: Chris Gerstel- yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum- yes, Dina Hannigan - yes

7.) Bay State Instructional Football Clinic

Ms. Hannigan made a motion to approve the Bay State Instructional Football Clinic held by Bay State Football Monday, August 11, 2025 – Wednesday, August 13, 2025, from 9:00am – 2:00 pm daily with fields to be used at the Director of Park & Recreation's discretion. Ms. Chaston seconded the motion, and it was passed as follows: Chris Gerstel- yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum- yes, Dina Hannigan – yes

Ms. Mulroy also received a request from Hank Haff, Director of Building Design & Construction, asking permission for temporary use of the upper parking lot at Rosemary Recreation Complex. The library is planning an interior renovation of the Young Adult area of the library later this year. The construction is anticipated to start in early September 2025

and be completed by January-February 2026. They are looking for a parking lot location for the construction trailer dumpster, and Connex box for the contractor during that construction period. Ms. Mulroy doesn't see an issue and this more of an "For Your Information", and to just check and see if the Commission had any major issues with the request.

- B. Policy Approvals – None
- C. Fee Approvals – None
- D. Meeting Minutes Approvals – None

Chairs Update and Issues Not Reasonably Anticipated by Chair within 48 hours

- 1.) Mr. Gerstel received an email from Myles Tucker, Support Services Manager with regard to the Stephen Palmer building/parcel of land. A working group is being created to help decide what to do with the building/land and they would like a member of the Commission on the Committee as Park and Recreation's parcel of land abuts it. He asked the Commission to think about it, and Ms. Chaston volunteered to be the Park and Recreation representative.
- 2.) Ms. Chaston received an email from Bob Baker who was asking about the status of Disc-Golf. Nothing has been done yet, but she would like to request that this be an agenda item for the next meeting.
- 3.) Field Permits – Field conflict emails have gone out, and the Department is still waiting for some user groups to get their requests in. When Ms. Corrigan is back in the office, the permit will be finalized and sent out.
- 4.) Ms. Mulroy also let the Commission know that she completed a Profit & Loss report for the pool. She will send it to the Commission for review. It has been sent to Dave Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance, and is waiting to hear back from him.
- 5.) There is an issue with the padding that is up behind the backstop at McLeod field at DeFazio that goes from dugout on first base line to the dugout on third base line. If you are in the first few rows, or in a wheelchair you cannot see over the padding at DeFazio. The bleachers are behind the backstop and spectators are having trouble watching the game due to the padding that is up. The Commission does not think that the pads should come down as they are there for the safety of the players, but are wondering if there are any other options. It will be expensive whatever is decided, and the majority of the Commissioners are not in favor of taking it down. Ms. Mulroy stated that DPW is working with Engineering for options, and it could cost a little bit of money or a lot of money depending on the options. She said safety is first, but she isn't sure we have to keep it up because no other field has them. Taking them out now would be difficult and would cost between \$30,000-\$100,000 depending on what needs to happen. Mr. Gerstel asked if this would be eligible to use funds from

the Athletic field fund. Ms. Mulroy said they would have to ask. She is trying to schedule another meeting to discuss the fund further.

Topics for Future Meetings

Newman Playground and Disc-Golf.

Next Meetings

The League of Women Voter's Candidates Night is on March 24, 2025, so the Commission may want to reschedule that meeting. The Commission also needs to reschedule the April 14, 2025, and May 26, 2025, meetings. Ms. Mulroy will send out a doodle poll to figure out the scheduling of these meetings.

Adjournment

Ms. Hannigan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 pm. Ms. Geddes seconded the motion, and it was passed as follows: Chris Gerstel- yes, Cindy Chaston – yes, Michelle Geddes – yes, James Rosenbaum- yes, Dina Hannigan – yes

Respectfully submitted,

Nikki Witham
Administrative Analyst